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ABSTRACT

Unskilled readers can become skilled readers and learners of whole text, if they are given instruction in effective strategies and taught to monitor and check their comprehension while reading. Two strategies for comprehension monitoring are self-questioning and reciprocal teaching. Questions students can ask before reading concern the concepts introduced and how the material was organized. Questions students can ask while moving from one subsection of text to the next concern understanding the main ideas in the previous section, and how they relate to those in the next. Questions students can ask after reading concern summarizing, listing main points, and ascertaining the material's significance. With reciprocal teaching, a student chosen randomly, following behavior modeled by the teacher, paraphrases or summarizes the content of the reading assignment and discusses difficulties in comprehension. The student then provides main idea sentences, and may predict test questions from the highlighted information. Inferences may be discussed relating the information to the students' lives and society, and personal experiences with the topic may be shared. (Information for student coding of major and supporting ideas in the text is included.) (HTH)

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Comprehension Monitoring Strategies For Whole Text

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association

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Abstract

Comprehension Monitoring Strategies For Whole Text

Unskilled readers can become skilled readers and learners of whole text. They need instruction in effective strategies. Students can be taught to monitor and check their comprehension while reading. Two strategies for comprehension monitoring are self-questioning and reciprocal teaching. Questions to teach students to ask themselves are provided as well as the reciprocal teaching procedure to promote active reading and studying.

Comprehension Monitoring Strategies For Whole Text

Herber (1978) says "Students who look for ideas as they read will find them; but if they look for nothing, they find that too!."

Students can be aided in their search for meaning from text when they are aware of what they can do to discover what they understand and what they don't understand while reading. Two strategies to help students discriminate between the concepts they have learned and the concepts they either do not understand or they have not yet learned are self-questioning and reciprocal teaching.

Knowing about and controlling one's learning is termed metacognition (Flavell & Wellman, 1977). To be effective learners, students should know about the state or level of their learning and the strategies for success they are using. The goal of instructional stategies should be to help less successful students develop more control over their learning.

There are two types of metacognition (Brown, 1982). One type relates to the knowledge that successful students have about various aspects of the learning situation. The other type refers to those self-regulatory activities that successful students engage in to produce comprehension when reading. This includes identifying the important ideas, rereading to clarify ideas, summarizing and paraphrasing, establishing and looking for relationships, determining the structure or organization of information, pausing to test one's understanding, relating information to one's previous knowledge, recognizing the sequence of events, self-questioning and self-testing (Tei and Stewart,

1985).

An important element to teach students to include in their reading and studying are setting specific purposes or goals. This directs their attention to the topic, to the knowledge or skill readers are supposed to have acquired, to the amount of effort required, and to the strategies that may be most effective in the extraction and retention of the information. Another element is directing student's attention to recognizing the structure of text (Tei & Stewart, 1985). This enables them to extract meaning because the details fit into a recognizable pattern. The organization can be discovered from recognizing signal words that give clues to patterns of organization such as enumeration, cause and effect, sequence comparison and contrast, examples, description, etc. Reading headings and subheadings to see how the ideas are tied together also may lead to the structure of the whole text.

Self-questioning

Proficient readers strive to make sense out of information through self-questioning, identifying important points, and focusing attention and effort on the major ideas. Some questions students may ask themselves are: What do I have to do to to understand what I am reading? Will I need outside help from the teacher? What is the most efficient way to understand this? What is the best way of determining the main points? With these types of questions students consciously try to make use of self-regulatory activities to control the flow of ideas (Tei & Stewart, 1985).

Effective studying and comprehension requires students to conduct

some kind of self-assessment of the information. Some metacognitive self-assessment questions are: What do I know about the topic after my study? What are the major ideas, and how are they related to each other? Can I summarize the reading material? Can I tell a friend what I just acquired from my studying? For each question, the student must provide a self-satisfactory answer to ensure that the material is known (Tei & Stewart, 1985).

Students can determine what they know or what they don't know from self-questioning routines (Brown, 1982). It is essential that students learn to monitor their own comprehension because a teacher in a large classroom is not able to perform this function for the students. Learning through reading makes it crucial that students notice when they have failed to understand (Brown, 1982). Self-questioning leads to active monitoring of learning and to strategic action (Brown, 1982). However, Collins, Brown, and Larkin (1980) suggest that many failures in comprehenison are due to students inability to ask the right questions. Therefore additional questions students can ask themselves before, during, and after reading are provided.

Questions to be asked before reading could be: What concepts are introduced? How are the various concepts related? How is the material organized?

Questions to be asked while reading as students move from one sub-section of text to the next are: Did I understand the main ideas in the previous section? How are the ideas in this section related to the previous one? Did the author introduce a new concept in this section?

Can I make a connection between all concepts presented so far?

Post-reading questions are essential for evaluating overall understanding of text. Questions that could be asked after reading are: Can I list the main points? Does the information have any personal significance for me? (Tei & Stewart, 1985).

Reciprocal teaching

Benware and Deci (1984) found that college freshmen who learn material with the expectation of teaching it are more intrinsically motivated, have higher conceptual learning scores, and perceive themselves to be more actively engaged with the environment than subjects who learn in order to be examined. Palinscar (1984) found that the reciprocal teaching procedure resulted in an increase in ability to answer comprehension questions and maintain the performance of junior high students.

Cohen (1985) found that reciprocal teaching encouraged underprepared college students to prepare assignments more carefully and consistently, it fostered the use of study skills and reading comprehension and vocabulary strategies, and it was the source for considerable class discussion and participation.

The reciprocal teaching guidelines are modified from a series of studies reported in Palincsar (1984) and Baker and Brown (1984). A package was designed to enhance reading comprehension processes in a metacognitive environment, and to afford student's the opportunity to monitor whether they understand what they read. Reciprocal teaching is both a comprehension fostering and comprehension monitoring activity.

Reciprocal teaching guidelines. 1. All students read the assigned text for homework and highlight the major ideas and supporting details and code it. (The coding system is below.)

2. In class, a student is randomly chosen to do the reciprocal teaching. (If students are assigned to do the reciprocal teaching, they will prepare the assignment while other students may not.) Before students are asked to perform, the teacher models the behavior for the class.

3. The chosen student paraphrases or summarizes the content of the reading assignment.

4. The student discusses difficulties in comprehension. This can be difficulties with vocabulary, concepts, organization, lack of background information, misunderstandings, or the inability to follow the author's arguments. This is clarification time and the student can ask for examples or provide them.

5. The student provides a main idea sentence. This is a good time to teach main idea and how to come to a conclusion or generalization that covers all of the ideas in the material when the main idea is unstated. This has to be repeated often.

6. The student may predict test questions from the underlined or highlighted information.

7. Inferences may be discussed relating the information to the students' lives and society. Personal experiences with the topic may be shared.

8. The teacher and the other students may give feedback to the

student at any time.

The coding-system. The coding system is adapted from a combination of strategies from Smith and Dauer (1984) and Simpson (1983). After reading a section selectively underline or highlight ten percent or less of the material. When appropriate enter symbols in the margin of the text and mark items. The codes are: MI = main idea; ? = confused, don't understand, or ask in class; * = ultra important or significant; ex. = example; def. = definition. Signal words are boxed, and items in a sequence are numbered.

The coding helps the reciprocal teaching progress smoothly. There is nothing to forget when the material is marked. The students teach the class what they have marked in addition to paraphrasing the information. They learn and use textbook study and marking habits that enable them to become active readers.

Comprehension monitoring is not automatically developed with age (Brown, 1982). Grade school, high, school, and college students can benefit from reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching can be done in pairs, groups, or with entire classes. Research in metacognition emphasizes that an awareness and deliberate use of comprehension monitoring strategies is critical for proficient reading. The value of reflecting on one's thinking is an awareness of metacognitive knowledge and its relationship to good reading (Paris and Myers, 1981; Myers and Paris, 1978).

All instructional strategies should prepare students to use the strategy while reading in order to construct meaning. Students must

become aware of what strategies are available for understanding and remembering text to expand content knowledge (Mason, Roehler, & Duffy, 1984). The important point is that if students attend, reconstruct, and elaborate text, then independent learning will be enhanced (Simpson, 1983).

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